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U.S. intelligence said hurt by '70s 'hysteria'

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A former staff member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence has charged that "the anti-intelligence hysteria" of the mid-1970s caused severe damage to the United States intelligence community and in one instance contributed to Cuban government efforts to identify a CIA agent in the Cuban government.

Herb Romerstein, a former aide to the late Rep. John Ashbrook, in a paper to be published this fall, argues that congressional oversight of intelligence cannot be conducted without "distorting the process through real or implied pressures."

A copy of Mr. Romerstein's paper, to be published in "Intelligence Requirements for the 1980s: Intelligence and Evaluation," edited by Roy Godson, was obtained by The Washington Times.

The climate created by the intelligence oversight committees of the mid-1970s led to sharp decreases in cooperation among the CIA and allied intelligence services because of the risk of unauthorized disclosures, Mr. Romerstein writes. It also resulted in "shattered" careers of U.S. intelligence officers whose identities were revealed by "irresponsible" congressional revelations, he says.

Mr. Romerstein charges that the first Senate committee to conduct investigations of CIA activities in 1975 under the chairmanship of Sen. Frank Church, committed "the most serious abuse" of intelligence oversight.

He reveals how a 1975 Church committee report on assassination plots involving foreign leaders iden-

tified a CIA agent in Cuba who was a high-level government leader known only as "AM LASH" who, according to the committee, had been involved in a Kennedy administration plot to kill Cuba's Fidel Castro.

A year later, journalist George Crile III used the Church committee report to piece together the identity of AM LASH. Mr. Crile wrote a Washington Post article which said AM LASH was Rolando Cubelas, a former comandante in Castro's rebel army who was then in a Cuban prison. He was pardoned for the attempted assassination in 1979.

Mr. Crile, who was recently a part of a libel suit settlement with Gen. William Westmoreland over a CBS Vietnam documentary he produced, defended the revelation by charging that continued secrecy would benefit "conspirators at the CIA," Mr. Romerstein writes.

Then in 1979, a House committee investigating the assassination of John F. Kennedy reported that "the Cuban government informed the committee that it had come to believe that AM LASH was in fact Rolando Cubelas" as a result of biographic information made public by the Senate committee, Mr. Romerstein said.

"Given this kind of irresponsibility on the part of congressional overseers, who could be expected to risk his life to gain intelligence information for the United States?" he asks.

In 1980 it became illegal to publicize the names of U.S. intelligence officers or their agents when Congress passed the Intelligence Identities Protection Act. — Bill Gertz